



Epitaxial growth of horizontally aligned single-crystal arrays of perovskite

Yitan Li^{1,2}, Yuguang Chen¹, Lu Han¹, Xuemei Li³, Jian Sheng¹, Hao Sun⁴ and Yan Li^{1,2*}

ABSTRACT Well-aligned single-crystal nanowire arrays of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ have shown potentials in laser sources and photovoltaic applications. Here we developed a solution based epitaxial method to grow $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowire arrays. By confining the precursor solution between a silicon wafer and ST-cut quartz, the evaporation rate of the solvent was slowed down which brings a more stable and controllable solution environment. Relying on the lattice match between $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ and ST-cut quartz, arrays of single-crystal nanowires of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ have been grown epitaxially. The densities and lengths of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires can be tuned. The lengths of the resultant crystals range from several microns to over one millimeter. Such $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ arrays with good alignment and crystallinity were then applied to fabricate photovoltaic devices with good performances.

Keywords: $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$, single crystal, arrays, epitaxial growth, tunable lengths

INTRODUCTION

Well-organized single-crystal arrays on substrates are preferred for the fabrication of devices with high performances [1–4]. Such arrays have been realized by various strategies, among which epitaxy has shown great success in fabricating ordered crystalline nanostructures of giant magnetoresistance materials and semiconductors on specific substrates [5–10]. To date, most epitaxial growth processes are based on gas phase deposition at high temperature by using state-of-art facilities. Solution-based material processing approaches are known to be flexible and cost-effective, and therefore have been broadly applied for the deposition of functional materials on substrates. However, it is still challenging to prepare

well-aligned single-crystal arrays *via* solution pathways [11–16].

Lead halide perovskites, which are normally processed with solution based techniques or chemical vapor deposition process, have shown significant potentials for photovoltaic and electronic applications and drawn great attentions relying on the high absorption coefficients, balanced and long diffusion lengths, and ambipolar carrier transport properties [17–23]. Single-crystal perovskites with reduced-dimensional structures including nanoplates (NPs), nanowires (NWs) and quantum dots (QDs) have been applied in photonic and quantum devices such as single-photon sources [24], light-emitting diodes [25,26] and photodetectors [27–29]. In particular, low-dimensional perovskite crystals have shown to be good candidates for small solid-state laser at room temperature since the amplification of spontaneous emission (ASE) was firstly demonstrated by Xing *et al.* [30–34] in 2014. For such applications, alignment of the crystals is important. Recently, studies about perovskite epitaxy by chemical vapor deposition have been reported [23,28–29] while few of them are based on solution process.

In a previous study, we reported the crystal structure match of the (010) plane of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ to the surface lattice of ST-cut quartz [35]. Both the lattice spacings of (001) and (101) planes of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ and the crystal face angle fit the structural periodicity of ST-cut quartz. Utilizing this lattice match, aligned $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ crystals were obtained when precursor solutions were directly coated and evaporated on the ST-cut quartz. However, because of the unstable mass transport and random nucleation sites, it is difficult to obtain organized crystals with high quality and clean surface [36–38]. The crystal

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qualities as well as the morphologies still need to be improved.

In open systems, the large gas-liquid interface area brings quick evaporation and fluid instabilities which are unfavorable for both the growth of high-quality crystals and the exerting of template effect of the substrate. On the other hand, a confined system has shown great advantage in harnessing the fluid behavior. Herein, we developed a method to realize the epitaxial crystal growth in confined solution systems. By restricting the precursor solution within the micrometer scaled space between two paralleled substrates (ST-cut quartz and Si/SiO₂), the evaporation rate of the solution is significantly reduced, making the crystallizing process more controllable. More importantly, menisci with tiny solution tips between two substrates are created, pushing the nucleation sites closer to the ST-cut quartz. Therefore, the template effect of the substrates can be well utilized. With this method, ultralong single-crystal CH₃NH₃PbI₃ nanowire arrays with nearly perfect alignment and high qualities were obtained. The lengths and densities of CH₃NH₃PbI₃ can be adjusted, showing the flexibility of our method.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Growth of CH₃NH₃PbI₃ arrays and fabrication of photodetectors

Typically, 0.2565 g CH₃NH₃I (99.9%, Dyesol, Australia) and 0.7435 g PbI₂ (AR, Aldrich) were dissolved in 3 g *N,N*-dimethylformamide (DMF, AR, Aldrich) to make a CH₃NH₃PbI₃ precursor solution with a mass fraction of 25 wt.% (0.1026 g CH₃NH₃I and 0.2974 g PbI₂ in 3.6 g DMF for CH₃NH₃PbI₃ precursor solution with a mass fraction of 10 wt.%). The precursor solution was sandwiched by ST-cut quartz and Si/SiO₂ with varying distances ranging from 20 to 300 μm. All the preparation processes were conducted in the glovebox under ambient temperature. A vacuum evaporator was used to deposit Ag layer with a thickness of 100 nm as the electrode of CH₃NH₃PbI₃-based photodetectors.

Characterizations

The CH₃NH₃PbI₃ nanowires grown on quartz were directly characterized with a cold-field emission scanning electron microscope (SEM-Hitachi S4800, operated at 2.0 kV, 10 μA). The transmission electron microscopy (TEM) specimen was prepared by directly rubbing the grid on the substrates with products. The high resolution TEM (HRTEM) characterization was carried out on a FEI Tecnai G2 T20 microscope. A Dimension Icon SPM

(Bruker, Santa Barbara, CA, USA) was used to perform the AFM topographic measurements of the CH₃NH₃PbI₃ arrays. The photo response performance of the devices was studied at ambient condition using a tungsten lamp.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The setup of this confined epitaxial method was shown in Fig. 1a, where the CH₃NH₃PbI₃ precursor solution was simply confined by two substrates (Si/SiO₂ on top and ST-cut quartz at the bottom) with distances at micrometer scales. As the solution evaporated from side to central part, the distribution of concentration in the whole solution system varied. The tips of solution menisci reached saturation at first and then aligned CH₃NH₃PbI₃ crystal nanowire arrays appeared as shown in Fig. 1b. When evaporating in the open air, the precursor solution coated on the ST-cut quartz experiences uniform evaporation, which often makes the nucleation sites away from the surface of ST-cut quartz. As shown in Fig. S1, irregular CH₃NH₃PbI₃ arrays with poor alignment and wide size distributions were produced. It is observed that CH₃NH₃PbI₃ microribbons interconnect with each other with rough surfaces.

In our method, the confinement setup decreased the

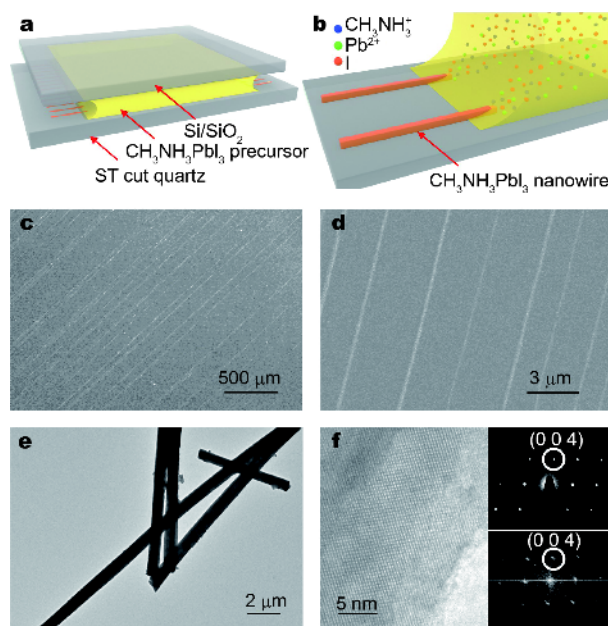


Figure 1 (a, b) Schematic illustrations of the growing process of aligned CH₃NH₃PbI₃ nanowire arrays by the confined epitaxial method. (c, d) SEM images of CH₃NH₃PbI₃ nanowire arrays at low (c) and high (d) magnifications. (e, f) TEM image (e) and HRTEM image (f) of single-crystal CH₃NH₃PbI₃ nanowires with selected area electron diffraction (SAED) patterns (up) and fast Fourier transform (FFT) patterns (down) inserted.

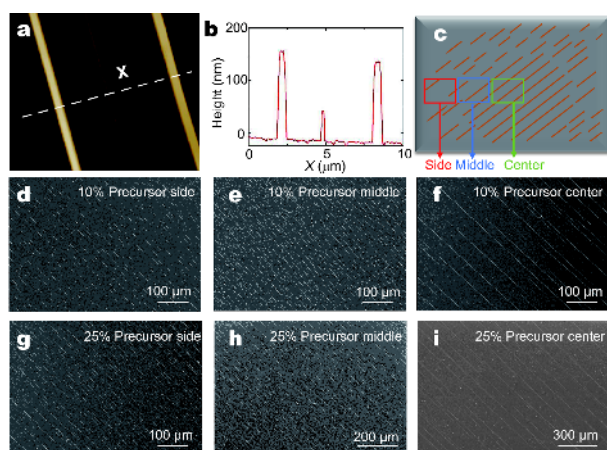


Figure 2 (a, b) AFM image (a) of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires with height data (b). (c) Schematic illustration of the $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ arrays formed at different regions of the ST-cut quartz in the confined epitaxial growth process. (d–i) SEM images of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ arrays grown from precursor solutions of different concentrations at different regions of the ST-cut quartz.

evaporating rate and limited most of the fluid flow in the solution to be laminar, providing a stable environment for the growth of high-quality single crystals. The menisci formed near the edges of solution bring the nucleation sites to the quartz substrate, increasing the template efficiencies. We were able to fabricate ultralong $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowire arrays of millimeter scale on ST-cut quartz with good alignment (Fig. 1c, d). As shown in the TEM image in Fig. 1e, $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ wires have rectangular shapes and uniform sizes. The HRTEM image (Fig. 1f) exhibited fringes perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the crystal with an inter-distance of $\sim 3.4 \text{ \AA}$, which can be assigned to (004) planes [39–41]. These results indicated that the $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires were single crystals with high quality. It can be observed that both $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires and their surroundings are quite clean, indicating that almost all the materials in the precursor solution were utilized in the crystallization (Fig. 2a, b). These clean nanowires are favorable for building high performance electronic and photovoltaic devices.

The lengths of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires can also be adjusted. Compared to the open system, our confined system introduces a more controllable lower evaporating rate. As the solution menisci move from edges to central parts, the evaporating rate decreases correspondingly due to the increased diffusion length for DMF vapor. (Fig. S2) It can be observed that $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires are longer at the central part of the substrate than those near the edges. (Fig. 2d–f) The faster eva-

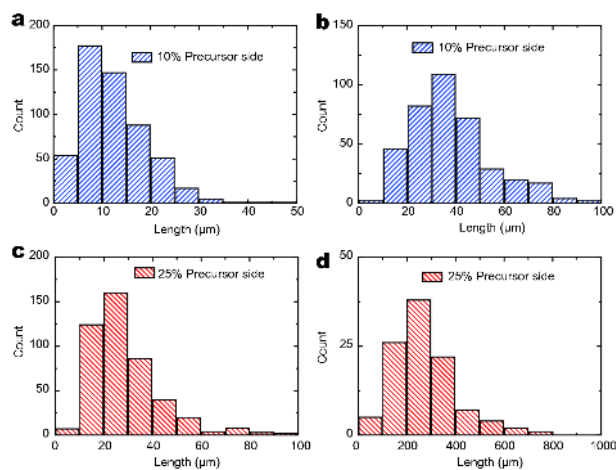


Figure 3 Length distributions of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires at side parts (a, c) and middle parts (b, d) of the ST-cut quartz which are grown from precursor solutions with concentrations of 10 wt.% (a, b) and 25 wt.% (c, d), respectively.

poration at the beginning brings about a higher supersaturation and more nucleation sites. This is why shorter $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ wires were obtained in the margin region. On the contrary, slower evaporation results in fewer nuclei and eventually longer wires with low density are obtained. The initiate concentration of precursor solution also affects the length and density of the wires. (Fig. 2g–i)

To statistically characterize the length distributions of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires at different regions and grown from precursor solutions with different concentrations, we measured more than one thousand $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires in total (Fig. 3). From side parts to middle parts of ST-cut quartz, the average lengths of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires increased from $12.5 \mu\text{m}$ to $38.0 \mu\text{m}$ (Fig. 3a, b) for 10 wt.% precursor solution and from $28.9 \mu\text{m}$ to $276.8 \mu\text{m}$ (Fig. 3c, d) for 25 wt.% precursor solution. In fact, at central parts, we found that the lengths of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires could reach more than $500 \mu\text{m}$ for 10 wt.% precursor solution and more than 1.5 mm for 25 wt.% precursor solution. In addition, $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires tend to grow denser as the concentration of solution increases.

To further illustrate the importance of confinement, we changed the distances between two substrates from 20 to $300 \mu\text{m}$ (Fig. S3). As the distances between two substrates increased, the $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ crystals became less ordered and eventually disordered. This result can be ascribed to the change of the guiding efficiency of the substrate to the crystal formation of the materials. As the distance increases, the size and shape of meniscus change, bringing

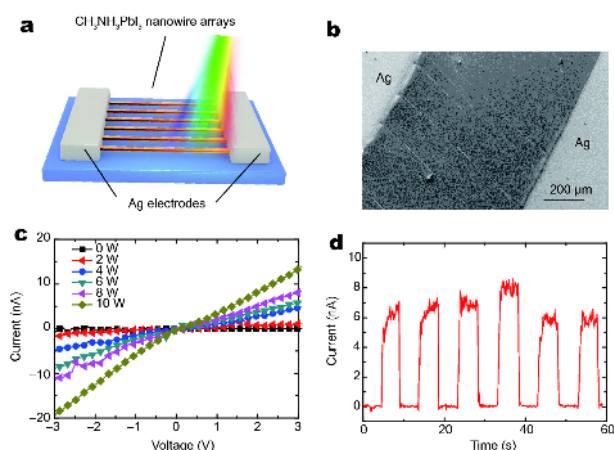


Figure 4 (a, b) Schematic illustration (a) and corresponding SEM image (b) of a $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowire array based photodetector. (c, d) I - V (c) and I - t (d) curves of photo response performances of the $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ based photodetector.

the nucleation farther away the substrate. In addition, the vessel contains more solution when the distance between the two slides is bigger. When the $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ arrays formed, new nucleation may happen in the excessive saturated solution, resulting in poor morphologies (Fig. S3f).

Due to the ultrafast charge generation, high mobility, long charge carrier lifetime and diffusion length [42–45], $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ single crystal arrays showed potentials for photodetector applications. We directly evaporate 100 nm Ag on the substrate as electrodes to fabricate long channel photodetectors and study their photoresponsive performances (Fig. 4). The channel length between two electrodes was about 800 μm . This long channel is beneficial to suppressing dark current and responsible for improving the detectivity of photodetectors. We measured I - V curves under incident light with power varying from 0 to 10 W and I - t curves under an ON/OFF interval of ~ 10 s. The photo response time was measured to be ~ 50 ms, which actually already reached the limitation of our detector. In addition, when we annealed the sample under 80°C for 2 h, there was no obvious change in photo-responsive performances, indicating the stability of the $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires endowed by the high crystallinity.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, large-scale single-crystal $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowire arrays have been grown on the ST-cut quartz *via* an epitaxial process in a confined solution system. Besides the lattice match between $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ and

ST-cut quartz, the confinement of the solution is also essential for the epitaxy. The precursor solution was sandwiched by a Si/SiO₂ wafer and a ST-cut quartz substrate, creating solution menisci with small tips contacting the substrates. Therefore the nucleation occurs on the ST-cut quartz then the further crystallization is templated by the substrate, resulting in high-quality $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowire arrays. The lengths of $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ nanowires can be adjusted from several microns to a subcentimeter scale with nearly perfect alignment and a narrow distribution of diameters. The well-aligned single-crystal perovskite nanowire arrays may find applications in electronic devices, sensors, and lasers.

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Author contributions Li YT and Li Y designed the experiments; Li YT, Chen Y, Han L and Sheng J engineered the samples and performed the experiments; Li X conducted the characterization of TEM; Sun H provided guidance in AFM characterization. Li YT and Li Y wrote and polished the manuscript.

Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Supplementary information Supporting data are available in the online version of the paper.



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利用外延生长构建水平单晶钙钛矿阵列

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摘要 有序单晶 $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ 钙钛矿纳米线阵列在激光和光电领域具有良好的应用前景. 溶液法被认为是一种简便、高效且成本低廉的方法并被用于构建钙钛矿晶体材料. 本文介绍了一种限域外延生长方法并将其用于构建有序单晶 $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ 钙钛矿纳米线阵列. 通过将钙钛矿材料的前驱体溶液限制在由硅片和ST-cut的石英构成的反应腔中, 溶液挥发行为受到限制, 进而为晶体生长提供了更加稳定可控的环境. 由于 $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ 和ST-cut石英之间存在晶格匹配, 可以在石英表面获得密集的单晶钙钛矿纳米线阵列. 通过调节反应腔尺寸, 可以进一步调控钙钛矿纳米线的长度, 获得长度为由微米尺寸到亚厘米尺寸不等的阵列. $\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$ 钙钛矿阵列进一步被用于光电器件的构建并获得了较好的性能.